

Cambridge University Press & Assessment

978-0-521-17311-7 — Berkeley's A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge

An Introduction

P. J. E. Kail

Frontmatter

[More Information](#)

## BERKELEY'S *A TREATISE CONCERNING THE PRINCIPLES OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE*

George Berkeley's *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* is a crucial text in the history of empiricism and in the history of philosophy more generally. Its central and seemingly astonishing claim is that the physical world cannot exist independently of the perceiving mind. The meaning of this claim, the powerful arguments in its favour, and the system in which it is embedded are explained in a highly lucid and readable manner and placed in their historical context. Berkeley's philosophy is, in part, a response to the deep tensions and problems in the new philosophy of the early modern period, and the reader is offered an account of this intellectual milieu. The book then follows the order and substance of the *Principles* while drawing on materials from Berkeley's other writings. This volume is the ideal introduction to Berkeley's *Principles* and will be of great interest to historians of philosophy in general.

P. J. E. KAIL is University Lecturer in the History of Modern Philosophy, University of Oxford, and Fellow and Tutor in Philosophy at St Peter's College, Oxford. He is co-editor with Marina Frasca-Spada of *Impressions of Hume* (2005) and author of *Projection and Realism in Hume's Philosophy* (2007).

CAMBRIDGE INTRODUCTIONS TO KEY  
PHILOSOPHICAL TEXTS

This series offers introductory textbooks on what are considered to be the most important texts of Western philosophy. Each book guides the reader through the main themes and arguments of the work in question, while also paying attention to its historical context and its philosophical legacy. No philosophical background knowledge is assumed, and the books will be well suited to introductory university-level courses.

## Titles published in the series:

DESCARTES'S *MEDITATIONS* by Catherine Wilson

WITTGENSTEIN'S *PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS* by David G. Stern

WITTGENSTEIN'S *TRACTATUS* by Alfred Nordmann

ARISTOTLE'S *NICOMACHEAN ETHICS* by Michael Pakaluk

SPINOZA'S *ETHICS* by Steven Nadler

KANT'S *CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON* by Jill Vance Buroker

HEIDEGGER'S *BEING AND TIME* by Paul Gerner

KANT'S *GROUNDWORK OF THE METAPHYSICS OF MORALS* by Sally Sedgwick

HEGEL'S *PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT* by Larry Krasnoff

NIETZSCHE'S *ON THE GENEALOGY OF MORALITY* by Lawrence J. Hatab

RAWLS'S *A THEORY OF JUSTICE* by Jon Mandle

HUME'S *A TREATISE OF HUMAN NATURE* by John P. Wright

HUSSERL'S *THE CRISIS OF THE EUROPEAN SCIENCES AND  
TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY* by Dermot Moran

ROUSSEAU'S *SOCIAL CONTRACT* by David Lay Williams

BERKELEY'S *A TREATISE CONCERNING THE PRINCIPLES OF HUMAN  
KNOWLEDGE* by P. J. E. Kail

Cambridge University Press & Assessment

978-0-521-17311-7 – Berkeley's A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge

An Introduction

P. J. E. Kail

Frontmatter

[More Information](#)

BERKELEY'S *A TREATISE*  
*CONCERNING THE*  
*PRINCIPLES OF HUMAN*  
*KNOWLEDGE*

*An Introduction*

P. J. E. KAIL

*University of Oxford*



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment

978-0-521-17311-7 — Berkeley's A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge

An Introduction

P. J. E. Kail

Frontmatter

[More Information](#)



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,  
a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of  
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521173117](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521173117)

© P. J. E. Kail 2014

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions  
of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take  
place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

First published 2014

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

ISBN 978-1-107-00178-7 Hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-17311-7 Paperback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence  
or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this  
publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will  
remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment

978-0-521-17311-7 — Berkeley's A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge

An Introduction

P. J. E. Kail

Frontmatter

[More Information](#)

---

*For Teddy  
and my students, past, present and future  
Sometimes ideal, and  
never immaterial*

## *Contents*

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>page</i> x
1 Introduction	I
2 Context and aims	12
3 The Introduction to the <i>Principles</i>	35
4 The argument for immaterialism	54
5 Against the philosophers: the refutation of materialism	70
6 Reality and God	86
7 Science and mathematics	116
8 Spirits	132
<i>Bibliography</i>	152
<i>Index</i>	157

Cambridge University Press & Assessment

978-0-521-17311-7 — Berkeley's A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge

An Introduction

P. J. E. Kail

Frontmatter

[More Information](#)

---

## *Acknowledgements*

The book was written with the support of the Master and Fellows of St Peter's College, Oxford, the Faculty of Philosophy, Oxford, and the wonderfully convivial Newberry Library in Chicago. Thanks to Hilary Gaskin and Gillian Dadd at Cambridge University Press, and Nicole Osbourne who had the difficult task of proofreading a version of this book. Thanks also to Lyn Flight for copy-editing and Carly Minsky for preparing the index.

A number of different people read parts of the manuscript at various stages. Thanks then to Arif Ahmed, Tim Mawson, Alasdair Richmond and Tom Stoneham. Among my students, particular thanks go to Sophia Nayak-Oliver, Oliver Sieweke and Joshua Wilce.

Thanks, of a different kind, to S. M. S. Pearsall and E. M. P. Kail.